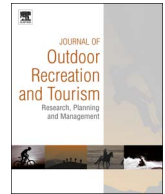




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jort

Tourism changing the edge of the wild

Zsófia Cságoly*, Anna Dóra Sæþórsdóttir¹, Rannveig Ólafsdóttir²

Department of Geography and Tourism, Faculty of Life- and Environmental Sciences, University of Iceland, Sturlugata 7, IS-101 Reykjavík, Iceland

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Semi-wilderness
Accessibility
Length of stay
Purism groups
Infrastructure
Iceland

ABSTRACT

Semi-wilderness areas located at the edge of the wild may be seen as buffer zones between the more isolated wilderness and the urbanized environments. Increased tourism in semi-wilderness areas has put pressure on increased accessibility, placing at risk many of the features attracting tourists. Hence, wilderness areas with increasing access are facing a variety of challenges. Using visitor experiences in the management of such areas has been identified as a powerful tool. This study aims to assess the experiences and preferences for environmental conditions and infrastructure in a semi-wilderness area among day and overnight visitors, foreseeing increased accessibility at the edge of the southern highlands of Iceland. Based on a questionnaire survey, preferences of day and overnight visitors were compared using independent *t*-tests, and the impact of length of stay and level of purism on infrastructure preferences was explored using two-way ANOVA. A significant difference is found between day and overnight visitors regarding their tolerance for crowding and needs for infrastructure; overnight visitors being more sensitive in both cases, day visitors expressing greater needs for facilities and services. Furthermore, length of stay is more important than the purism score in determining infrastructural preferences. It is concluded that the expected growth in day visitor numbers is likely to result in degrading wilderness values available for overnight visitors who seek solitude and limited infrastructure.

Management approaches: Planning semi-wilderness areas as a response to increasing levels of accessibility, with the resulting shift in wilderness-values, will cause further changes in visitor types attracted to the area. By identifying the type and extent of impact that the establishment of extensive infrastructure improvements and improved access can have on the experiences of day and overnight visitors, their effects can be examined and addressed in a flexible manner by management, in order to preserve the attractiveness of the area and the wilderness experience in semi-wildernesses.

1. Introduction

During the past centuries, remote regions have gained increasing popularity as tourist destinations, coinciding with a growing global demand in nature-based tourism (Buckley, 2006). Natural barriers have often limited access to wild nature, restricting the number of visitors, and thus providing opportunities for others to experience solitude, remoteness, primitiveness, and both physical and mental challenges (e.g. Manning, Valliere, Minter, Wang, & Jacobi, 2000; Lawson & Manning, 2001; Stewart & Cole, 2001; Manning, 2007; Vaske & Shelby, 2008; Juutinen et al., 2011). Sutter (2002) and Lane (2009) emphasize difficulty of access and lack of roads as key elements in visitors' wilderness experiences. Remoteness, lack of accessibility

and primitiveness have furthermore been identified as the main indicators of wilderness quality (e.g. Cole & Hall, 2008a; Fritz & Carver, 1998; Lesslie & Taylor, 1985). Lately, many remote areas have become more accessible due to the development of infrastructure, such as better roads and on-site facilities, and increased technology in regard to vehicles, leading to more frequent day-trips into areas that previously took days to reach (Hall & Page, 2014; Buckley, 2006; Pigram & Jenkins, 2006; Hall & Saarinen, 2010). This is especially true for the wilderness edges, which may be defined as semi-wilderness areas. The difference between the type of visitors attracted to semi-wilderness areas, in contrast to those who are prepared to experience multiple days in a more isolated and challenging wilderness, has long been noted (Ewert & Hood, 1995). In this regard, Cole and Hall

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: zsafia.csagoly@gmail.com (Z. Cságoly), annadora@hi.is (A.D. Sæþórsdóttir), ranny@hi.is (R. Ólafsdóttir).¹ Department of Geography and Tourism Studies, Faculty of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Iceland, Askja, Nature Science Building, Room 335, Sturlugata 7, IS-101 Reykjavík, Iceland.² Department of Geography and Tourism Studies, Faculty of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Iceland, Askja, Nature Science Building, Room 342, Sturlugata 7, IS-101 Reykjavík, Iceland.

(2008b) suggest that the length of stay may be a more accurate indicator for pinpointing visitors' on-site preferences than the extent of use, with day-users often being the less sensitive type (Cole, 2001).

Iceland has experienced massive growth in international tourist arrivals with an average annual growth of 22%, over the last five years (Icelandic Tourist Board, 2015a). The majority (79.7%) of international visitors to Iceland come with the main intention of experiencing nature (Icelandic Tourist Board, 2014). Designated wilderness areas currently cover about one third of the country, of which nearly 60% is located in the uninhabited interior highlands (Ólafsdóttir & Runnström, 2011). During the past decades, accessibility into the highlands has gradually increased, due in part to the construction of access roads intended to service hydro power plant development, and later due to tourism development (e.g. Sæþórsdóttir, Hall, & Saarinen, 2011). Currently, the most popular tourist destinations in the Icelandic highlands are facing increased pressure from tourist visitation (i.e. The Environmental Agency of Iceland, 2015; Ólafsdóttir & Runnström, 2013; Sæþórsdóttir, 2014).

This study attempts to contribute to the management of semi-wilderness areas by analysing visitors' opinions depending on their length of stay, and by critically discussing sustainable tourism management in the semi-wild. The overall aim of this paper is to examine the experiences and preferences for environmental conditions and infrastructure among day and overnight visitors in semi-wilderness areas. A questionnaire survey was carried out in Húsadalur, Þórsmörk, a popular tourist destination located at the edge of the southern Icelandic highlands. Access to this area has long been limited due to unbridged glacial rivers surrounding it, and is only possible using powerful 4WD vehicles from the lowlands or arriving by foot from the highlands. Currently, the area is facing improved accessibility with upgrades to roads and a walking bridge projected to span one of the glacial rivers, making the area far more accessible. Consequently more day visitors are expected to come. This paper therefore aims at analysing whether there is difference between day and overnight visitors' preferences, as that would then greatly change the area's tourism settings.

2. Balancing on the edge of the wild

Numerous studies (e.g. Cole, Watson, & Roggenbuck, 1995; Ewert, 1998; Chavez, 2000; Schneider, 2000; Hammit & Schuster, 2000; Abbe & Manning, 2007; Pierce & Manning, 2015) show that with increased access and the subsequent rising popularity of day-trips to natural areas, management faces increasing challenges. As an example, management of wilderness and semi-wilderness areas as a response to increasing levels of accessibility threatens the basic values of the wilderness experience (Higham, 1998; Cole, 2000; Hendee & Dawson, 2001). However, it has been shown (e.g., Lawson & Manning, 2001; Manning, Valliere, & Wang, 1999; Nash, 2014; Sæþórsdóttir, 2013; Carver, 2014) that in the absence of planning and management of the increased visitation rates and infrastructure developments, the naturalness of many wilderness areas is declining. Additionally, coinciding with increased tourism development, conflicts between the various user groups are likely to arise as certain groups may be less satisfied with their experience, leading to their replacement by others with higher tolerance for crowding and greater needs for services and infrastructure (Butler, 1996; Higham, 1998; Sæþórsdóttir, 2003, 2013; Hall, Seekamp, & Cole, 2010). Improved and increased access to semi-wilderness areas may thus be seen as one of the major factors influencing wilderness areas, subsequently increasing pressure on more isolated regions. If not managed properly, such evolution has the potential not only to degrade the areas natural environment but also to decrease the quality of the wilderness experience. In this regard, it has been pointed out (i.e. Cole, 2004; McCool, Clark, & Stankey, 2007) that balancing expectations of the various user groups and matching them with appropriate natural settings for a long-term

protection of fragile landscapes is a challenging, yet fundamental goal for the effective management of wilderness areas.

Many researchers (e.g. Bryan, 1977; Duffus & Dearden, 1990; Newsome, Moore, & Dowling, 2012; Fennell, 2014) demonstrate that understanding visitors' preferences for management purposes is an important facet of successful management models. An example of such a model is the purism scale model, which identifies four groups, distinguished according to visitors' preferences within natural settings (Stankey, 1973; Fredman & Emmelin, 2001; Vistad & Vorkinn, 2012; Sæþórsdóttir, 2013). The four purism groups form a continuum with *strong-purists* on one end, followed by *moderate-purists* and *neutralists* in between and *non-purists* or *urbanists* on the other end. Strong purists have a greater preference for pristine environments, solitude, primitive facilities and freedom, whereas urbanists require good services and facilities, and express greater tolerance towards the presence of other visitors (Stankey, 1973; Sæþórsdóttir, 2013). Previous research (Shin & Jaakson, 1997; Ewert, 1998) has identified a correlation between visitors arriving to exclusive wilderness areas and having high purism scores, whereas areas with lower perceived wilderness values accommodate visitors with lower purism scores. This underpins the relationship between the different purism groups, accessibility and areas naturalness (Fig. 1). Increased accessibility open up an area for different kind of visitors and thus decreases the area's naturalness moving the area towards urbanists' preferences. In this regard Ólafsdóttir and Haraldsson (2015) point out that an increase in accessibility will in turn attract moderate purists and neutralists, and with the growing number of visitors, demands for more infrastructure and more services will increase. Ultimately, this makes the area attractive to urbanists' visitors and results in acceleration in the number of visitors to the area. Understanding the balancing edge of the wild is therefore a vital factor in managing wilderness.

3. Study area

The study was undertaken at Húsadalur in Þórsmörk, an area situated on the edge of the southern highlands of Iceland (Fig. 2). Despite the relative closeness of Þórsmörk from the capital (about 155 km), as a consequence of its geographic location, access to Þórsmörk has traditionally been limited, due to unbridged glacial rivers. The area now faces increased accessibility by a proposed walking bridge reaching the Þórsmörk area at Húsadalur, and was therefore selected as a case study location for this research. Improved access is likely to increase number of day visitors to the area and subsequently demand of improved services and facilities.

As the Þórsmörk area is situated in close proximity to active

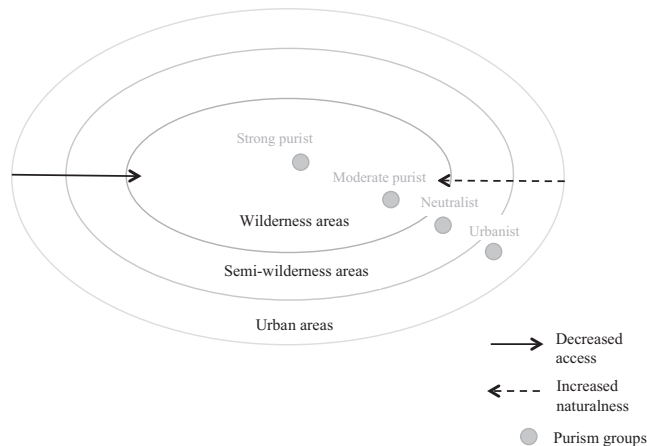


Fig. 1. A conceptual model presenting the relationship between purism groups, accessibility and naturalness (Adapted from Stankey (1973) and Lesslie and Taylor (1985)).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4759876>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4759876>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)